

Report to COUNCIL 1st November 2023

Children and Young People Portfolio Update

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Mushtaq, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Children's Safeguarding

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) front door for children's social care and early help delivers efficient, timely and targeted screening and response where families tell their story once and are being correctly signposted to services to get the right service for the right child at the right time.

We continue to receive high levels of contacts in the MASH and a high rate of referrals. However, our focused improvement programme has led to improvements in the timeliness and quality of practice and is improving help for families and children. We continue to face challenges in recruitment and retention of permanent social workers.

Children's Partnership

The Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership (OSCP) have undertaken six local child safeguarding practice reviews. The OSCP strategy focuses on improving complex and contextual safeguarding, domestic abuse, children's mental health and impact of trauma, neglect and transitions. The OSCP has worked at pace to implement action plans from the learning from local reviews.

Children Looked After

The number of children in care to the Council remains broadly stable at 556 (at 11 October 2023). Our edge of care provision (ASU) has a consistently high success rate (above 85%) in supporting families to remain together or in supported placements and 2 of our 3 children's homes are rated 'Good' by Ofsted.

Care leavers are given priority housing banding and supported to bid on properties when the time is right for them. There is council commitment not to make care leavers intentionally homeless. The most significant challenge we face is finding appropriate placements for the increasing complexity of children becoming looked after, resulting in more children and young people placed in external residential placements.

We have challenges with regards to identifying suitable, affordable accommodation for young people approaching 18, enabling a smooth transition. The Children in Care Council and Youth Council delivered a motion to full council to make care experienced status a

protected characteristic as part of our corporate parenting responsibilities which has been passed. The upcoming activities during Care Leaver Week at the end of October included raising awareness of Care Experienced individuals and the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities.

We're working collaboratively through our Corporate Parenting Panel to improve placement sufficiency by delivering our ambitious plans to increase the number of Council foster carers, residential provision, local externally commissioned placements and securing suitable accommodation for over 18s to increase the number of Oldham children and young people placed in local provision.

Adoption and Fostering

Our Fostering recruitment campaigns have resulted in registering 5 new fostering households and 11 new connected/kinship carers keeping children with their families. We have the lowest use of Fostering Agency placements in Greater Manchester. 56% of children looked after are placed with Oldham Fostering Service or connected/kinship carers enabling our children to live in familiar communities, remaining in their schools, and maintaining links with family and friends.

Adoption Now, our regional adoption Agency has secured a diverse range of adopters who can meet the needs of our children leading to 73% of Oldham children being placed with internal adopters so far in 2023/24.

Early Years

Our first Family Hub on the Beever school site has opened, and plans are progressing well to have a family hub in each district. Family hubs will support the delivery of better early help to families in communities.

81% of eligible 2-year-olds are benefitting from early education places compared to 74% nationally. 96% of 3- and 4-year-olds are benefitting from early education places compared to 94% nationally.

97% of early years providers and 98% of childminders are judged to be providing good or outstanding provision by Ofsted, resulting in the vast majority of children, including those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or SEN support, accessing their early education in quality early years provision.

Children who have reached a 'good level of development' (GLD) outcome at age 5 has improved from 60% in 2022 to 63%, whilst national increased from 65% to 67%.

Early Help

We've refreshed the Early Help Strategy to focus on strengthening earlier intervention to better meet children, young people and family's needs.

Targeted early help teams are supporting 470 families with 1,100 children. Family Help Tool outcome scores evidence 80-90% of families have most issues resolved at case closure and 75% of families close with all issues resolved, with housing and unemployment among the issues most difficult to resolve.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.